Burnt Bridge Creek Watershed

Description of the watershed

The Burnt Bridge Creek watershed is comprised of 28 square miles of mostly flat to somewhat hilly land.The creek originates in field ditches that drain a large wetland area between NE 112th Avenue and NE 164th Avenue, then flows through another large drained wetland between NE 86th Avenue and NE 18th Street. For its first eight miles, the creek channel alternates between ditches and natural channels. For its last five miles, it flows through a small canyon with a narrow flood plain. Ultimately, Burnt Bridge Creek flows into Vancouver Lake.

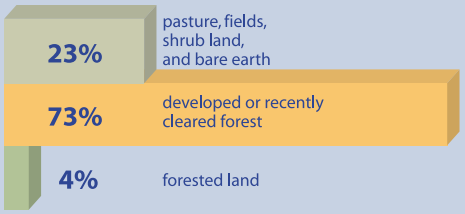
Burnt Bridge Creek has few visible tributaries. Before the area developed, most rain soaked into sandy and gravelly soils that undery much of the watershed. Also, with development, many streams were diverted to underground pipes. Cold Creek, the largest tributary, drains the area north of Minnehaha Street. Peterson Ditch and Burton Channel drain from near Interstate 205 west to Burnt Bridge Creek. Another very small creek flows west from springs at Bagley Park to Burnt Bridge Creek.

Except for flood plains, parks, and wetland areas, nearly all of Burnt Bridge Creek basin is urbanized. About two-thirds of the watershed is in the city of Vancouver. Nearly the entire length of Burnt Bridge Creek and much of Cold Creek are within the city.

Over the years, the city of Vancouver and Clark County have created a greenway corridor and park system along the creek. Ultimately, plans call for an eight-mile trail system between Vancouver Lake and Interstate 205. At this time, the creek and nearby marshes are accessible at many points for wading, fishing, and wildlife viewing.

While fish habitat is in poor condition, coho salmon are found in the lowest segments of Burnt Bridge Creek, below Interstate 5. Winter steelhead are present through most of the creek.

Land uses in the Burnt Bridge Creek Watershed



Using a summer 2000 satellite image, the University of Washington determined that Burnt Bridge Creek watershed is 73 percent urban land use and only four percent forestland. Much of the grassy area is flood plain, wetlands along Burnt Bridge Creek, seasonal wetlands in upper Cold Creek, and parks and playing fields.

How healthy are Burnt Bridge Creek Watershed streams?

Burnt Bridge Creek and its tributaries are in poor to very poor health. One small segment of Peterson Ditch near Interstate 205 was rated fair based on one year of water quality data. The Washington Department of Ecology has listed Burnt Bridge Creek as not meeting state standards for fecal coliform (harmful) bacteria, temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen.

Measurements of healthy streambed insects are the lowest of any monitored stream in Clark County, indicating very disturbed habitat. Stream temperatures are very high, indicating a lack of shade along the streams. Levels of harmful bacteria are a serious problem in Burnt Bridge Creek and its tributaries, especially since they are typically the highest during peak recreation in the summer. Past studies attribute the bacteria to both animals and leaks from septic systems. This prompted a city program to connect households with septic systems to sanitary sewer.

Burnt Bridge Creek was studied extensively during the 1970s as part of the formation of the BBC drainage utility and continued through the late 1990s as part of the utility's operations. More recently, Vancouver's Endangered Species Act program collected information on the creek's health.

The following bar charts show overall watershed health ratings from four perspectives. Monitoring information is available for the entire main stem of the creek and several very small tributary channels. Several main stem sites were monitored for water chemistry, bacteria, and streambed insects. All other sites had information about water chemistry and bacteria only.